

Contamination, seen and unseen

Local, state and federal efforts join to clean up Lake Washington site

By Dean A. Radford
Journal Reporter

Lake Washington's decades as an industrial workhorse are mostly over, but it still bears the scars on its surface and in its sediments.

Poking up in the lake between Renton and Mercer Island are pilings left over from decades of holding massive log-storage yards in place on the lake.

Unseen but captured on underwater video is a huge slug of coal tar that was spilled into the lake decades ago from a barge docked at the end of a long T-pier off north Renton.

Those pilings and the pile of coal tar could become history, too, under cleanup plans proposed by local, state and federal officials. So will similar contaminants at the state's newest federal Superfund site on shore.



This roughly 65 acres, with about a mile of waterfront, is just west of the 44th Street Northeast exit off Interstate 405 between Renton and Bellevue.

It's some of the most desirable lakefront property on the lake and will become home

See CONTAMINATION, A7



Patrick Hagerty/Journal

GETTING STARTED

A look at what will be involved in the cleanup process for the Quendall Terminals Superfund site, A6



Matt Brashears/Journal

▲ EPA official Lynda Priddy, left, and Robert Cugini, whose family co-owns the Quendall Terminals property, stand near a pond on the Superfund site on Lake Washington in north Renton that's home to waterfowl and turtles and helps contain runoff from the site.

◀ Abandoned boats, including this one on the shore of the Quendall Terminals site on Lake Washington, are a common problem and a potential threat to the environment.

Contamination: Restoration has taken years

CONTINUED FROM A1

to the Seattle Seahawks in 2008.

But the land — three distinct parcels — has environmental issues, not surprising, considering logs were milled there, coal tar was turned into creosote, and wood, including telephone poles, was treated with preservatives.

Years spent on legal issues

Years and even careers have been spent dealing with the legal issues and trying to get the contamination cleaned up, with significant success and at a cost of millions of dollars.

The 23 acres where Paul Allen will plunk his Seahawks have been cleaned up and there are new native plants growing near the shore. A power line separates his land from the Superfund site. It's unlikely any contamination moves between the two.

Researchers from Texas A&M University (the same one that challenged the Seahawks' use of the 12th Man flag) will take samples of the lake's sediments in July, as will a dive team with the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Nowhere else is the lake exposed to such potentially deadly toxins, officials say, although sewage lines have broken, spilling human waste into the lake. The wood waste in the lake off the now-gone Barbee Mill was typical of what was found near other former mills.

Seeing the potential

A bigger problem is the derelict boats left abandoned or washed up on the lake's shore. The state is working to remove two dry docks abandoned in the lake and now a hazard to boaters.

Robert Cugini, whose family co-owns the Quendall Terminals site and operated the Barbee Mill next door for decades, sees the possibilities in the roughly 42 acres his

family owns on the lake.

The Cuginis and Allen have spent millions of dollars to clean up contaminants on their properties.

"The bigger thing is to look at what it could be," Cugini said.

His family now is planning an upscale residential development on the Barbee Mill site.

Just to the north is the 23-acre Quendall Terminals site, the state's newest federal Superfund site. It doesn't feel, look or smell like one of the most heavily contaminated sites in the nation.

But it's not the senses that will determine what eventually happens there.

The lake is an incubator for numerous fish species and is home to endangered fish runs. It's a favorite for boaters and water skiers. About two miles away is the mouth of the Cedar River, which, according to officials, supports the largest sockeye run in the Lower 48 states.

There are two swimming holes within a half-mile of the site, Newcastle Beach and Kennydale Beach.

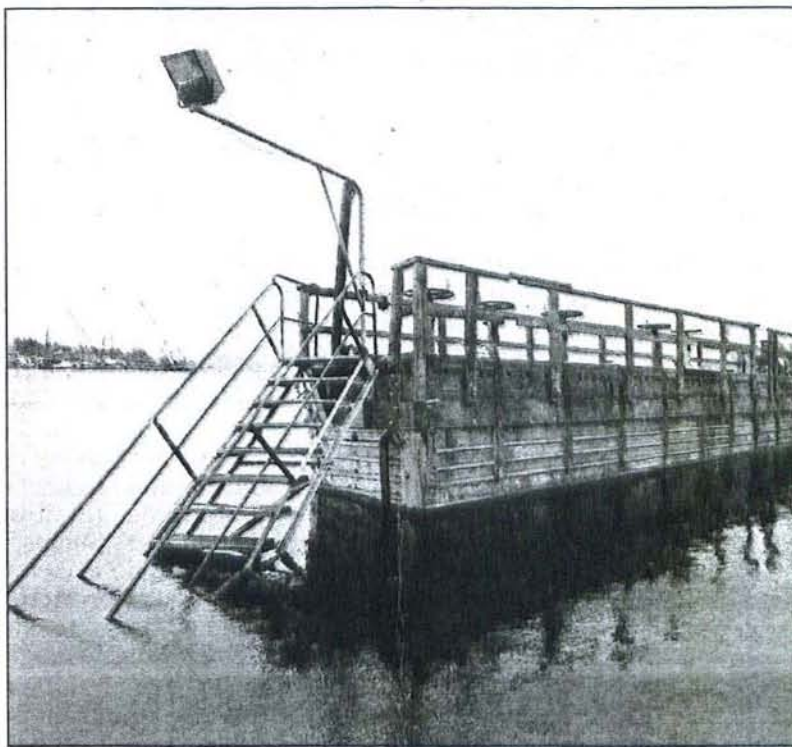
For those reasons, the lake is not ignored by government regulators.

Contamination not apparent

But the site defies stereotypes. There are no rusting barrels of toxic chemicals and no bubbling cesspools, although a toxic sheen on the shoreline speaks to the contamination on shore.

Waterfowl and turtles have made a home near the lake in a pond designed to capture runoff from the site.

Work goes on at a log-sorting yard, with ruts dug into the ground. But the workers there aren't at risk of exposure to the toxins, which are under several feet of soil, said Brian Sato, who as a project manager for the state Department of Ecology once was responsible for the Quendall site for the state.



Two dry docks, including this partially submerged one, sit off the Quendall Terminals.

"The active log sorting is all above ground," he said.

The yard is on a month-to-month lease, Cugini said.

But what's unseen — underground — could kill or at least make someone very sick. There's coal tar and creosote moving slowly toward the lake. It's the raw material that went into making creosote at the Reilly Tar and Coal Co. decades ago. In some places, it's 4 feet to 6 feet deep, according to the EPA.

Tainted groundwater

Ecology department studies of several years ago revealed that groundwater — which flows to the lake — is contaminated at depths up to 50 feet.

And then there's that unknown amount of coal tar that was spilled into the lake about 200 feet offshore.

The remnants of the creosote-manufacturing operation contains cancer-causing benzene, along with other highly toxic compounds.

The coal tar was produced decades ago as a byproduct of the coal-fired electrical plant at Seattle's Gasworks Park on Lake Union.

Nearby are some of the hundreds of pilings once used to corral the logs waiting for the Barbee Mill.

What happens to those is determined by the state Department of Natural Resources, which manages the lake's sediment, but not the actual water.

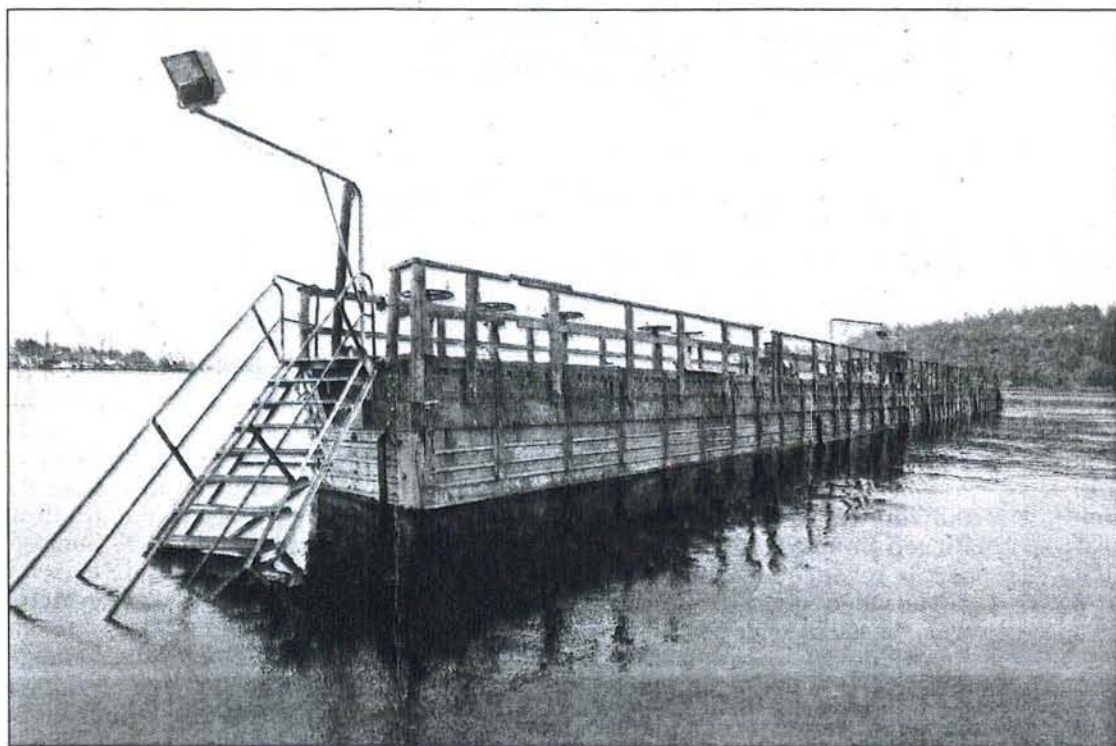
About 100 of the pilings and so-called dolphins (pilings roped together) remain in the lake. They are a navigational hazard and are falling apart, but they don't contain creosote, said Monica Durkin, the DNR's land manager for Lake Washington.

Durkin has used global positioning to plot the pilings and will apply for the state permits this month that are needed to remove them.

The actual removal would occur between July and next winter during a "fish window."

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Restoration has taken years, cost millions



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Matt Brashears/Journal

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State will remove pilings

The state will pay for the removal, using money set aside for lake restoration projects. The money will come from the state, rather than from the Cuginis and others who had state leases to use the lake, because the leases are old and would take time to sort out, Durkin said.

"I would rather just see (the pilings and dolphins) get out quickly," she said.

She doesn't yet know how much the project will cost, although it could be "decent-sized." Also working in the project are Renton, Mercer Island and King County.

There's already success in returning the lake to its pre-industrial days. The Barbee Mill stuck out over the lake, but now it's gone and the Cuginis have restored about 560 feet of shoreline.

The Cuginis, as part of their cleanup of the Barbee Mill site, removed dozens of pilings and woody debris from the lake.

They also removed about 54 tons of potentially contaminated soil from the mill property that contained contaminants.

The city of Renton at one point considered taking temporary ownership of the Quendall Terminals site in order to apply for government grants to pay for the cleanup, estimated at \$30 million.

The idea then was to sell it to Paul Allen, who would develop a multiuse development. But that didn't pan out after he and the Cuginis couldn't agree on a sale price, and the land remains in the hands of the Cugini family and the out-of-state J.H. Baxter family.

Unfinished cleanup plan

There's little left to the imagination about Quendall Terminals. Studied for decades, the site was turned over to the federal Environmental Protection Agency by the state Department of Ecology last year.

Robert Cugini is getting frustrated.

He and the state never settled on a cleanup plan, despite spending five years "and a lot of money" developing one, he said. Now, the EPA will take several months getting up to speed on what research has been done, and determining its validity. In essence, the EPA will have to vouch for the work done by the state.

"We aren't throwing it away," Lynda Priddy, the EPA's project manager, said of the work that's already done.

On the plus side, with federal jurisdiction comes the potential that money from the Superfund program will help pay for the cleanup.

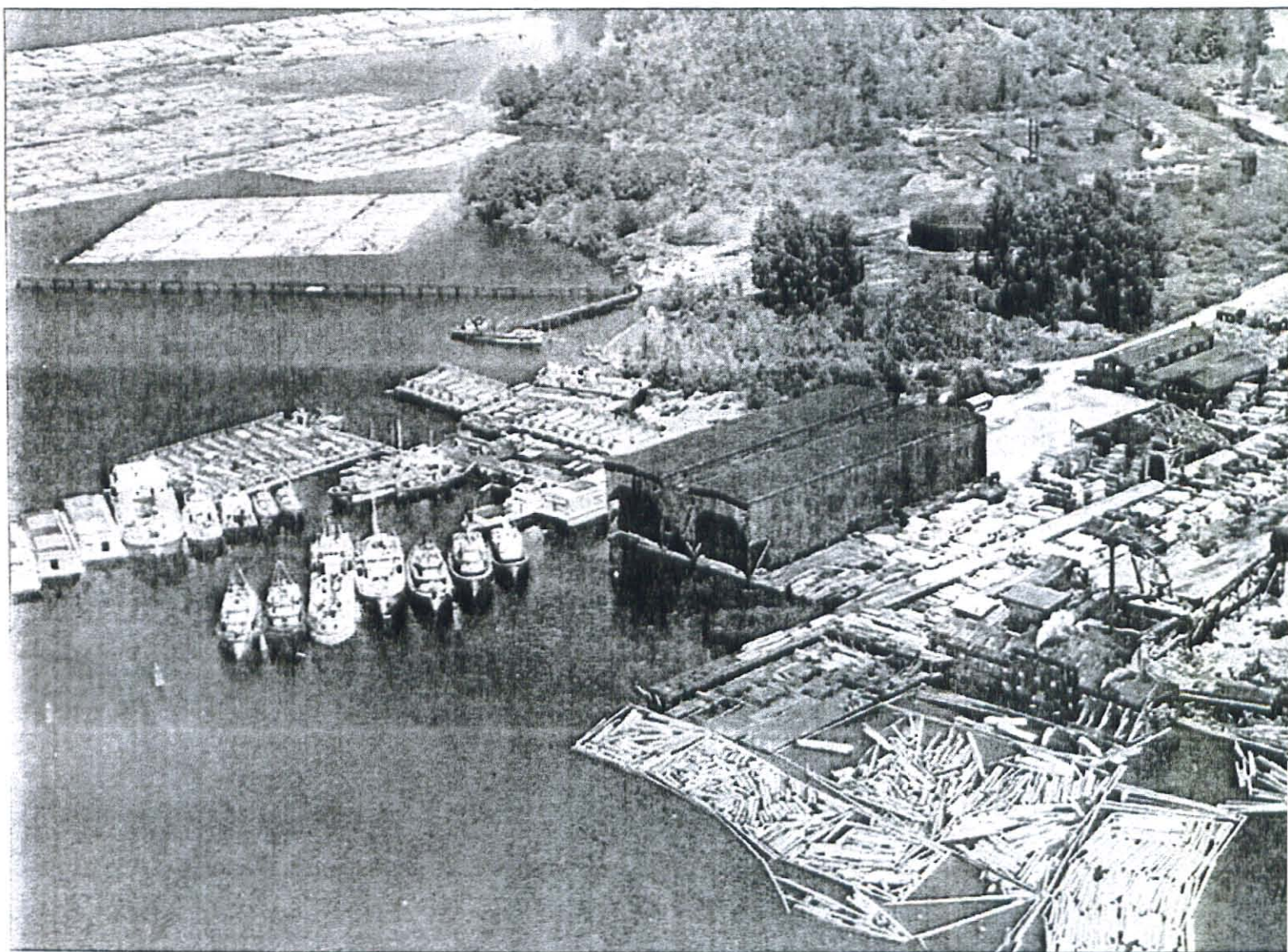
That's tempered by the fact that the nation has dozens of such sites and the cleanup must compete with other government programs for support.

Dean Radford covers Renton. He can be reached at dean.radford@kingcountyjournal.com or 253-872-6719.

'The bigger thing is to look at what

ROBERT CUGINI, WHOSE FAMILY CO-OWNS THE QUENDALL TERMINALS SITE

QUENDALL TERMINALS: AS IT WAS



EPA will involve public in Superfund

By Dean A. Radford
Journal Reporter

The federal Environmental Protection Agency will involve the public in planning for the cleanup of the highly-contaminated

Renton and the out-of-state J.H. Baxter family, are negotiating the studies that will be done on the site contamination and what technologies will be used to clean it up.

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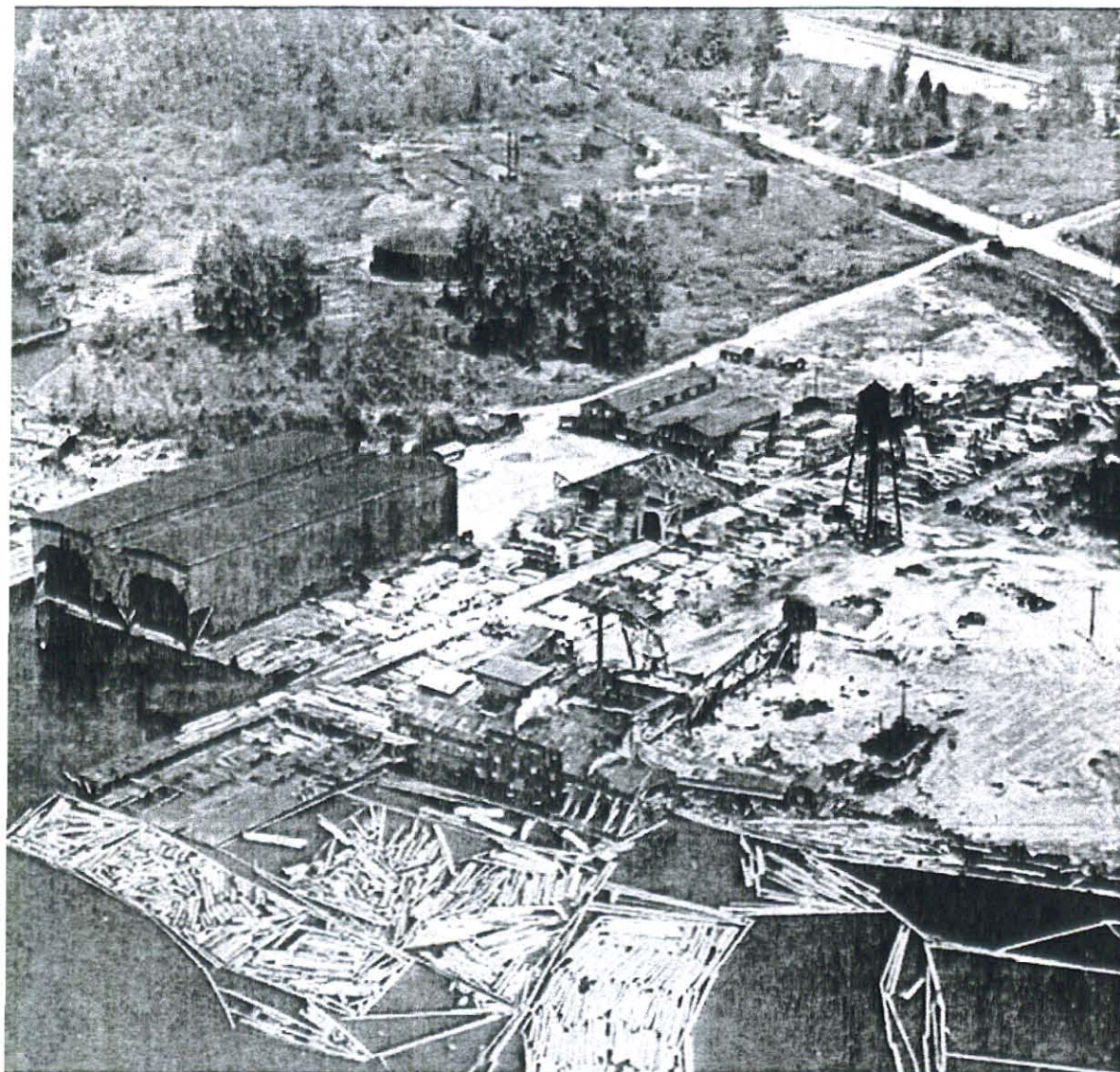
This summer, the EPA will map out a community involvement plan to explain the process and the issues to the public and to list contacts



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QUENDALL TERMINALS: AS IT WAS



Cugini family photo

This historical photo shows the Barbee Mill at lower right, with its large log-storage yards visible in Lake Washington, and a creosote-manufacturing plant at the top on what's known today as the Quendall Terminals site.

public in Superfund cleanup process

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Protection Agency will involve the public in planning for the cleanup of the highly contaminated Quendall Terminals site on Lake Washington in north Renton.

The EPA also will pay for one recognized citizens group to hire outside experts and to gather information so that its comments about the plans are well-informed.

The Quendall Terminals site is being cleaned up under the EPA's Superfund program, which targets the nation's most toxic sites and includes plenty of community involvement in the cleanup planning.

The agency will announce dates for public hearings as the cleanup plan is made. Right now, the EPA, along with the owners, the Cugini family of

tion and what technologies will be used to clean it up.

Later, the parties will sign agreements on the actual cleanup, which will cost millions of dollars.

As a Superfund site, Quendall Terminals is eligible for federal cleanup money.

The public will have a chance to comment on the EPA's recommendations for a cleanup, said Charles Bert, a community involvement coordinator for the agency.

A set of recommendations typically can take years to develop for a Superfund site, he said, but the Quendall Terminals site has been extensively studied under the supervision of the state Department of Ecology.

The timeline now depends on how much of the data col-

process and the issues to the public and to list contacts with the agency, Bert said.

Developing that plan will involve interviews with local community members to find out what they know about the site and how they would like to see it used, he said.

The EPA also will have documents about the site at a central place, possibly the Renton Municipal Library.

Part of a typical Superfund outreach is a \$50,000 technical-assistant grant for an incorporated community group to analyze the project. The grant is not available to a government.

"It's sort of a check and balance," Bert said.

The EPA will put out an official notice about the grant, but those interested can call Bert at 360-753-8073.



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'We aren't throwing it away.'

LYNDA PRIDDY, EPA PROJECT MANAGER,
ON THE CLEANUP WORK THAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE

The state Department of Natural Resources is putting together a proposal to remove pilings in Lake Washington between Renton and Mercer Island that once were used to hold log-storage yards but now pose a threat to boaters.



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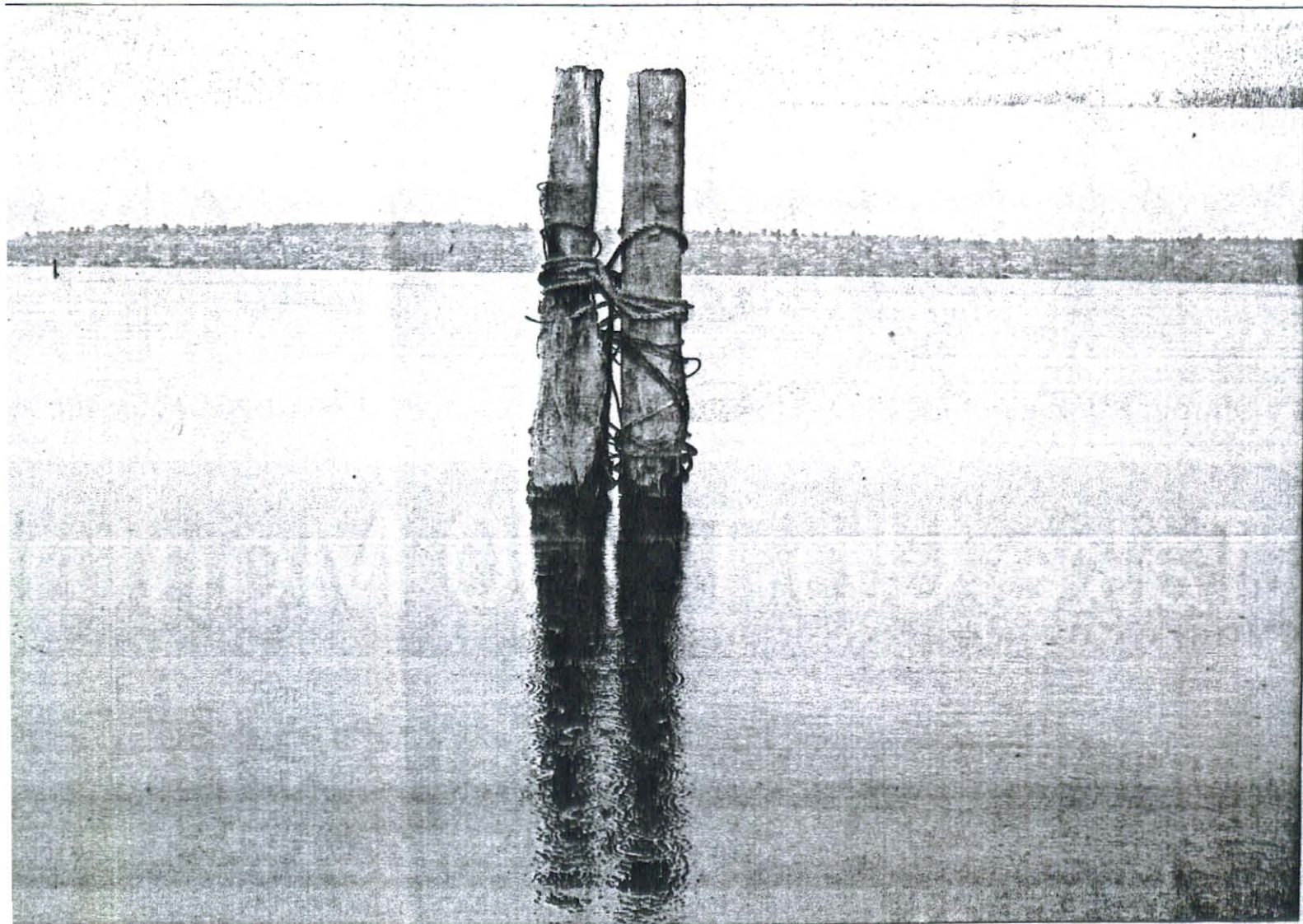
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Matt Brashears/Journal

Officials believe that slicks like these on Lake Washington are the result of flow from underground contamination, such as creosote and coal tar, at the Quendall Terminals site in north Renton.



Matt Brashears/Journal